

PAUL GILFILLAN

# Nation and culture in the renewal of Scottish Catholicism

This is the second of two articles on Catholics and the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence by a senior lecturer in sociology. Here he considers the alignment of younger Catholics with the independence movement.



At a book signing event on 23rd March 2015 the former First Minister Alex Salmond remarked to audience members that future studies would show that Scotland's Catholics voted Yes in the 2014 Referendum while Protestants voted No. This prediction, however, had already been empirically established in October 2014 by the Scottish Referendum Study<sup>1</sup> which, on the basis of a sample of 4,849 voters, had found that 58% of Catholics voted for independence, while only 41% of Church of Scotland members had voted for independence (with 54% of those of 'no religion' having voted in favour of independence). When presenting these figures, Professor Ailsa Henderson remarked that they were unsurprising and 'very much confirming what we know from previous findings'. Similarly, when reviewing the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes data, sociologist Michael Rosie (2013) observed that 'Catholics were actually the religious sub-group most likely to support an independent Scotland in 1999. This remains true in 2012'.

If sociological research tells us that Catholics are leading the pro-

independence movement among Scotland's population, this support for independence among Catholics is unsurprisingly accompanied by a decisive shift from the Labour Party to the SNP. In the twelve years from 1999 to 2011, Scottish Catholics have moved from being as likely as any other social group to vote SNP to positively preferring to vote SNP. The 2007 Scottish Election Study, for example, found that 30% of Catholics voted for the SNP, while the 2011 Scottish Election Study found that 43% of Catholics voted for the SNP.

However, while the Scottish Referendum Study's finding of a 17% difference in how Catholics and Protestants voted in the referendum seems pretty clear-cut, answering the question whether this difference is due to *being Catholic* or *being Protestant* is not straightforward as variables such as class, age, ancestry and cultural identity are all likely to come into play. If 59% of Protestants voted against independence, for example, it has to be borne in mind that Scotland's Presbyterians are disproportionately older than the general population. 'While 40% of those aged

over 65 say they are Church of Scotland, only 10% of those in their 30s, and just 5% of those aged 18-29 do so' (Rosie 2013). So it is likely that many Protestants voted against independence because this segment of the population is disproportionately older than the general population, rather than because they are Protestants.

We also find that: 'In contrast [to Scotland's Presbyterians] the age profile of Catholicism, which has resisted secularisation more successfully, lies much closer to that of the general population' (Rosie 2013), so that the strong alignment between Catholics and independence is not because Catholics happen to be younger than Presbyterians.

If not age, then, is there perhaps a class-based explanation of the relation between Catholics and support for independence? Is it because Catholics are more working class, for example, in light of the long-established finding that 'support for a Scottish parliament has been higher in working-class than in middle-class groups in every survey that has ever asked the question' (Brown et al. 1996, p. 153)?

I recall a conference I attended in 1996 where Professor David McCrone reported that 57% of Scotland's Catholics were manual working class, while only 48% of the general population were classified as working class. However, if we update the sociological profile of Scotland's Catholics using the 2001 Census we find that Catholics 'have much the same socio-economic profile as Church of Scotland identifiers' (Bruce 2014, p. 50). So that if Scottish Catholics in 2015 are no more working class than the average Scot, but are clearly more in favour of independence, it seems their higher-than-average support for independence is not the result of their age-profile or social class.

Perhaps, then, the factor that might explain the elective affinity between Catholics and independence is the ethnic background or Irish ancestry of most of Scotland's Catholics, and in this regard perhaps the Scoto-Irish historical-cultural element and, more specifically, the period of The Troubles in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 1998, has meant younger generations of Scottish Catholics have been more or less coerced into being more politicised and pro-Scottish and anti-British than their parents' generation. By way of personal anecdote I recall growing up in the 1970s and 1980s when the British national anthem was played by the BBC to mark the end of each day's broadcasting. In my house someone would always rush to switch the television off before it could begin.

The rise of post-industrial affluence is also relevant to explaining the elective affinity between Scotland's Catholics and the pro-independence movement. I propose that there is a relation between the end of the 'dictatorship of scarcity' (Beck 1992, p. 20) and the end of a traditionally subordinate and politically quietist Catholicism. Material affluence coupled with greater education has meant younger generations of Catholics have exited any ghetto mentality and re-imagined themselves and their politics along the lines of integral representation, thanks to a younger generation of post-Conciliar Catholics being more or less coerced by their experience of a representational deficit during 1979-1997 and 2010-2020 into politicising their Scottish identity. An alignment between class and Catholicism and the constitutional question was more or less inevitable.

### From the 'poor relation' to blood relatives

If there are macro sociological forces that have brought Catholics into alignment with nationalism there are developments within Catholicism itself that are in alignment with the rise of Scottish nationalism. A younger generation has been more or less coerced into re-contextualising their Catholicism as a result of inheriting the insights of Vatican II, as well as clerical decline and an economic situation of affluence. If we are seeing the entry into politics of Scotland's Catholics on the basis of more than simply their class identity i.e. on the basis of their full selves or integral *dasein* (i.e. Heideggerian *being-in-the-world*), then there is a social and ecclesial basis for the development of a more self-aware and distinct *Scottish* Catholicism.

To recognise these alignments is also to recognise the range of forces that were previously aligned against *not only the development of Scottish nationalism but the development of a Scottish Catholicism* among an older generation. Hence, while it would *not* be unfair to argue the Catholicism of my elderly informants is more or less alienated from the current signs of the times, this is judging them in relation to a new social, geo-political, economic and ecclesial context, and the more balanced representation is that my elderly informants were deeply integrated with a set of social and ecclesial conditions which have passed (*Open House* August 2015). An older de-nationalised generation of Catholics, then, were more or less coerced into a constitutional quietism thanks to the theological universalism they received from a de-nationalised clergy and a church hierarchy full of the baleful influence of clericalism and supernaturalism and a political situation of an imperial Britishness and an economic situation of 'scarcity.'

However, if, as I argued, an older generation could be fairly described as alienated from the present historical moment, the 2014 Referendum process was a politicising and consciousness-raising event in a way that the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has so far failed to be a conscientisation event for the Church in Scotland. Hence, if a 'blood relative' of this generation's failure to engage with, far less align with, Scottish nationalism *in their capacity as Catholics* was their inability

to engage with and renew Scottish Catholicism, this signals what needs to be done by younger generations. Just as an older generation of Catholics have a stateless Christianity that fails to see the nation as one of the necessary media of its incarnation and an older generation of clergy and laity's pre-Vatican II understanding of Catholicism meant they played no part in the work of re-thinking their Catholicism free of an inherited supernaturalism and clericalism, it thereby falls to younger generations to effect the pressing task facing Scottish Catholicism, which is to re-make the broken relationship between culture/nation and Catholicism into a new relation that may be described as 'blood relatives.' If the best guarantee of future success for the Church is to re-make this link, then the modelling of an integral Scottish Catholicism is to all intents and purposes the task of younger generations who are being more or less coerced by the historical and political and ecclesial conditions into retrieving an earlier pre-British conception and practice of Scottish sovereignty, as well as exercising new leadership in the work of imagining a post-Conciliar Scottish Catholicism.

### The Renewal of Parish, Deanery & Diocesan Self-Consciousness

My research echoes and describes a shift to pro-independence views among Catholics which only sociologists seem aware of, while Catholics themselves are not, so that Scottish Catholicism seems to lack self-awareness. Furthermore, and in line with arguments articulated in *Open House* by Fr. Mike Fallon (May 2015) and Mike Mineter (April 2015), I propose that my research also highlights how the current call for renewal and re-organisation in the archdiocese of St. Andrews and Edinburgh highlights the fact that my own parish, deanery and archdiocese has little consciousness of itself and for good reason. Its members are not in possession of a plan of action that they are charged with implementing in their parishes and deaneries, so that there cannot be a developed self-consciousness or the renewal of Scottish Catholicism.

This process of renewal and re-imagining is allied to the post-Vatican II awareness that Christian faith is called to be in a relationship to public and political life, and if Christian faith is

called upon to be in relationship to the social world, the only question is what relationship should that be. We can say it is not to be one of subservience where faith is dominated by the State or dominated by the Nation, while it also cannot be one of indifference or benign neglect, but one of, if not integration, then one of tension or equality and mutual recognition. This renewal then cannot take refuge in clericalism, or an inherited geo-political subjugation; nor in an unthinking Britishness at a constitutional level or traditional allegiance to the Labour Party at a political level; nor take refuge in a theological universalism that refuses the exigencies of thinking and participating and leading the particular national context. I propose, then, that there must be an alignment between Scottish Catholicism and Scottish Nationalism at the level of discourse and self-awareness if the nation is to be retrieved for the Catholic imagination, and with the important proviso that this development does not *necessarily* mean identifying Catholicism with *political* nationalism, but rather creating a fully-contextualised Scottish Catholicism that Yes and No voters can be part of.

### Conclusion

Catholicism has a dual or two-storey vision of human being which has a purely natural and a purely supernatural beatitude and which must be brought into relationship with each other, and so what is required is what is always required in order to be Catholic: an embrace of the secular and the social and the historical and the national as its proper media. The Catholic understanding whereby grace perfects nature means these two realms (on the one hand *nation and culture* and on the other hand *the ecclesial community* of the church) cannot be confused or mixed together as if they can be one thing; but neither can they be strangers or not in relationship to each other. In effecting this renewal, Catholic writers, artists and 'producers of culture' must reflect on the political practice of Catholics and how their shift in political allegiance signals the need to articulate a re-balancing where a renewed imagining of Scottish Catholicism is as ambitious for itself as the pro-independence parties and electorate are ambitious for Scotland. It must provide a vision of a Scottish Catholicism that is architecturally and artistically and aesthetically ambitious for itself.

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1. <http://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/multimedia/why-scots-voted-no-professor-ailsa-henderson-university-edinburgh>

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